



INL's co-mingled recycling program, which is now one year old, has resulted in nearly 25 percent less trash taken from the laboratory's Idaho Falls facilities to the local landfill.

INL's recycling program anniversary sees environmental, financial rewards

By [Rebecca Jones](#), INL Communications & Governmental Affairs

One year ago, INL asked employees to make a simple change to their work-life habits: recycle. It's not that the laboratory wasn't recycling prior to October 2008; it's just that previous recycling efforts were limited to office paper, corrugated cardboard and — in some facilities — aluminum cans. Other items were thrown in the trash and sent to landfills.

"While we had tried to put recycling opportunities in place, there was certainly room for improvement," said Jennifer Morton, INL's Pollution Prevention coordinator. "We knew that our employees were willing and able to do more, we just needed to find a path that would let them make the smarter environmental choice."

INL devised a phased approach to implementing a larger, co-mingled recycling project to send less waste to landfills and more reusable items to be processed into new materials at recycling facilities. Last year, the laboratory placed co-mingled bins around its Idaho Falls facilities to encourage employees to recycle items such as magazines, plastics, aluminum soda cans and metal cans rather than throwing them into their personal trash cans. INL also expanded its paper recycling efforts, simplifying the process for employees to recycle sensitive documents.

The co-mingled program required careful coordination with the subcontractors that clean the Idaho Falls facilities and a local recycling company. Janitorial staff at facilities with co-mingled recycling bins play the role of advocates and educators for the recycling program — encouraging employees to recycle items that may have been thrown into their trash cans. The janitorial staff members also have the responsibility to empty the contents of the recycling bins into separate dumpsters. The items in these containers are then collected, sorted and recycled by a local business.

And while employees are simply making the small choice to place their items in designated bins down the hall instead of trashcans in their offices, this change has yielded significant dividends for the laboratory. During fiscal years 2007 and 2008, INL recycled around 120,000 pounds of office paper and corrugated cardboard. In Fiscal Year 2009, when the co-mingled recycling program began, the lab recycled nearly three times as much — more than 340,000 pounds of material. Prior to the recycling campaign, an estimated 12,000 cubic yards of garbage were taken from INL's Idaho Falls facilities and moved to landfills each year. After the co-mingled recycling program was implemented in these facilities, the amount of trash collected by the city shrunk nearly 25 percent to an estimated 9,300 cubic yards.



The success of INL's co-mingled recycling program relies on employees using bins to recycle items like magazines, plastics and aluminum soda cans.



A Western Records Destruction shredding truck regularly picks up and shreds paper from the laboratory's Idaho Falls facilities.

While this represents almost triple the amount of material recycled at the Idaho Falls facilities, the recycling campaign has also had some positive financial rewards for INL. Because INL is charged by the frequency of trash collection, it saved approximately 38 percent of funds that would have been allocated to paying for trash collection.

The laboratory isn't ready to consider the recycling campaign a completed success just yet. This year, it plans to pilot a similar recycling program in facilities out on its desert Site.

"We want the entire laboratory to have an opportunity to make the easy decision to recycle more of the items we use on a daily basis," explained Morton. "And employees like the opportunity to feel like their decisions are making a difference for the laboratory and the environment."

Making recycling an easy choice for employees has paid off for INL. With positive environmental and financial results, the laboratory is celebrating the one-year anniversary of the co-mingled

recycling program with bright hopes for many positive anniversaries to come.

